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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000872

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL, DRL/IRF, DS/IP/EAP, DS/IP/ITA,
DS/CC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM SOCI PREL PGOV ASEC KIRF VM

SUBJECT: ATTEMPTED SELF-IMMOLATION IN FRONT OF CONGEN HCMC

REF: HCMC 846 and previous

¶1. (SBU) At approximately 0900 local time, August 19, an unidentified man, dressed in street clothes, collapsed a short distance from the main entrance of the U.S. Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City. The Consulate local guards rushed to assist, and found that the person's clothes were doused with gasoline or a similar fuel. The person also had a bottle of fuel on his person. He had a cigarette lighter in one hand and a letter in another. ConGen guards quickly removed the lighter to ensure the man's safety. Ho Chi Minh City police responded and arrested the man and removed him to an unknown location. We have requested Ho Chi Minh City authorities provide us with the results of their investigation on the individual.

¶2. (SBU) It appears that the individual is linked to Hoa Hao dissidents in the Mekong Delta, two of whom had self-immolated on August 5 (reflets). Following the incident in front of the ConGen, we received a call from Le Quan Liem, a leader of the Hoa Hao dissidents based in HCMC. Liem said that a contact of his "in the Delta" said that there would be a self-immolation attempt in front of the Consulate. He told us that he had no prior knowledge of this effort and asked us if anything had happened.

¶3. (SBU) Separately, Truong Van Duc, another Hoa Hao dissident leader based in the Delta's An Giang Province, called us at 0830 to inform us of his decision to apply for resettlement in the United States under the "P-1" program. He complained that his home remains surrounded by police officers, but he did not make any reference to action in front of the Consulate.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Paragraph 5 contains suggested "if asked" press guidance on the incident. In all of our previous contacts with Liem and Duc, we have emphasized that self-immolation is not an acceptable form of protest no matter the grievance and that we would end contact if such attempts continued. Liem has told us that he understood and was trying to counsel restraint, but that he has limited influence over his followers in the Delta. True or not, we believe it is time to make clear that the USG does not condone violent extremism in any form and to minimize contact with Liem's group. End Comment.

¶5. (SBU) Begin "If asked" press guidance:

¶Q. Did someone try and self-immolate in front of the Consulate on August 19?

¶A. This morning, an unidentified man apparently attempted self-immolation in front of the main entrance of the U.S. Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City. Consulate guards and Vietnamese security officers prevented the attempt.

¶Q. Who is this person? Was this incident linked to other self-immolation incidents in the Mekong Delta? What happened to the letter he was holding?

¶A. We have no further information on the identity of the person, who was subsequently detained by local police. The United States categorically rejects self-immolation and all other acts of violent extremism no matter the underlying grievances. We urge all involved to avoid taking actions that might lead to loss of life.

WINNICK